

AlterMutuel temporarily suspended

Network: Alternative Mutuality Employers Network (AMEN)
Date interview: 16/10/15
Name interviewer: Borris Pel (JULB)
Name interviewee: Rosa Liebknecht
Position interviewee: initiator; member

The suspension of the AlterMutuel network involved several measures to "disappear from the radar". The members of the network held a joint meeting, the very evening after they had received the announcement on the Luxembourg government's plans regarding the EU directive on workplace regulations. They decided that evening to have their website offline immediately, and to stop any other communications on behalf of AlterMutuel or under the header of FEO. They also requested AMEN to remove their logo from their website, ensuring them that they would probably join again under another name.

"We just needed time to find out how we could respond to the announced regulations. But as we all felt a bit threatened by the way in which the announcement was phrased and framed, it just seemed the logical thing to do. To me at least - I had enough sorrow to mind within my own organization [the waste disposal service], and was surely not eager to engage in some principled legal battle that we would eventually lose anyway". It was "obviously a critical turning point as we basically had to withdraw the website, the communications and the production of information materials that we had been developing with this small group of people. Moreover, we were just getting the feeling that we were achieving something, as recently a few new members had joined".

The CTP also interrupted the growth of the network.

Co-production

The CTP, the suspension of the network, that was simply their own decision. Yet it was an immediate response to the announcement of Luxembourg national government to change workplace regulations.

"Yes, in the beginning we cursed the minister for his narrow-minded and rigid approach to that EU directive, for his slavish adoption of imposed workplace regulations, and for the easy way in which he seemed to betray the progress we have made here on sustainable, decent, labour practices that are just demonstrably better geared to the society of today and tomorrow. But well, once we dug into the files we found out about pressures the minister received from both right-wing political parties and the unions, and about the political balances and stakes on the European level... maybe it was not so much the minister to blame for it...".

More broadly, she also considered how the whole episode seemed to have to do with the tightening labour market, the growing influx of migrant workers and the ensuing concerns over enforcement of labour regulations, and somehow "that general aversion to organizational novelties... even our own people seemed to grow tired of FEO".

Related events

The event was an immediate response to the announcement of Luxembourg national government to change workplace regulations (20/11/2007), which in turn followed an EU directive that had been in preparation since Spring 2004. Later events immediately connected to the event were the further announcement of amended Luxembourg workplace regulations in December 2008 and the re-start of AlterMutuel on 02/03/2009.

"Well, we had come to understand soon enough that our national regulations left sufficient room for the most important FEO principles of job rotation. There were some funny, little tricks to suggest fixed workplaces, and we had even used that clause 19 to refine the FEO principles. It's not the rotation itself that matters so much, but the underlying principles. So well, we postponed our official return a little, so as to come back with a brand new website - stuffed with information about workplace regulations, of course!"

She also indicated CTP 5, "AlterMutuel consultancy started", as direct result or 'spin-off' from this episode.

Contestation

The suspension of AlterMutuel resulted from majority decision. "Well, it was just quite a chaotic, emotional meeting, during which all kinds of issues kind of suddenly came up. Most of us just wanted to play it safe, to avoid further trouble before we had figured out what was going on... but two of the members were quite insistent that we shouldn't back down, and that we should seize the moment to gain attention for FEO principles, and stand up for it now that it really mattered. Well, these happened to be two of the latest members... so there you had it, my fellow initiators were not at all amused about these 'volunteering leaders'!"

Anticipation

The CTP itself, the suspension of the initiative, was self-decided. Still, it was